



WE ARE
TR!



TwinRivers
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Moving the District Forward

Big changes happening in Twin Rivers schools by Mike Blount

Since he was hired as superintendent, Dr. Steven Martinez has worked to create an environment of success at Twin Rivers Unified School District. From campus renovations to teacher training programs and the implementation of Common Core, he believes these changes are helping students and teachers be the best they can be every day.

After he graduated from Fresno State with a degree in biochemistry, Martinez taught science at a summer course designed to introduce rural students to a college campus. Martinez says that experience really pulled him into education.

"Very few of them had exposure to universities at all, so it was a tremendous opportunity for me to talk to them about what college can do for them," Martinez says.

Martinez taught science and math before becoming vice principal and principal at schools in Clovis. In 2009, he became the assistant superintendent of Fresno Unified School District. When he came to Twin Rivers in April 2013, one of the things Martinez immediately recognized was the district's potential.

"I just really thought about how much opportunity there is to truly make a difference for students and staff, to build a learning organization and develop a strong identity for Twin Rivers and the communities it serves," Martinez says.

He is excited about the change happening in the district and has visited campuses, local churches and other groups in the community to share that message. The "Feel the Difference!" initiative puts new emphasis on teachers, staff and administration to look creatively for a pathway leading all students to college and career readiness.

Part of that initiative includes expanding the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) program for

Superintendent Dr. Steven Martinez says the district is committed to meeting the needs of the community.
Photo courtesy of Twin Rivers Unified School District



"We truly believe Twin Rivers will set the pace moving forward."

Dr. Steven Martinez
Twin Rivers Unified School District superintendent

grades one-six. Teachers have been hired to come in once a week to teach a visual arts/music lesson that ties into Common Core state standards. More arts teachers are being hired, and Martinez takes part in every teacher interview to ensure the district hires the most talented staff. Another change is lowering the student-to-counselor ratio, which allows counselors to provide more personalized attention to students. Several campuses also are getting major renovations that will help improve the learning environment and increase student and faculty pride.

"We are definitely in a far better place than when we first began this journey together," Martinez says. "We

are stronger and the culture is changing districtwide."

Martinez says the district will continue to focus on ways to strengthen and enhance its academic programs and invest in its schools so students and staff are learning and working in state-of-the-art facilities.

"The plan is in place and centers around our Board-approved Core Beliefs that will guide us over the next few years," Martinez says. "You're going to see a district that's fluid, flexible and meeting the needs of the community. We truly believe Twin Rivers will set the pace moving forward."

TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Timeline

2007

Measure B is approved by voters, merging the North Sacramento, Del Paso Heights, Rio Linda Union and Grant Joint Union High school districts.

2008

300 community members enter a contest to name the new district and the winner is selected: Twin Rivers Unified School District.

2012

New school board elected.

Base API score for the district is 731, an improvement of 26 points from 2009.

2013

Dr. Steven Martinez is hired as superintendent of TRUSD.

2014

Local Control Accountability Plan initiative begins.

District begins work on \$25 million in facilities upgrades, including new HVAC systems, playground equipment and paint.

Excited About the Future

New initiatives build a foundation for what matters most — student achievement

by Michelle Carl



This year, Twin Rivers Unified School District held a back-to-school event for staff from across the district's 53 schools. Teachers were dancing, waving signs in the air like they were at a pep rally. Administrators were laughing — everyone was genuinely proud to be there. It was something Craig S. Murray hasn't seen for a long time.

"To have everybody in the district come together, that is something that matters to us — we are all working together," says Murray, Twin Rivers' executive director of secondary education.

Murray is in his 10th year in the district — he was principal at Grant Union High School for eight years — and says a lot has changed during his tenure.

When the district was created in 2007 as a result of the unification of four other school districts (North Sacramento, Del Paso Heights, Rio Linda Union and Grant Joint Union High), there were challenges.

"The dream was to have a cohesive district, but the structures weren't put in place to do that," Murray recalls. "Even though we were in a place of 'one' — we were divided."

Although Twin Rivers was a new district, longstanding divides between the schools and the communities they served remained. Inefficiencies plagued the fledgling district. Murray recalls a "circle the wagons" mentality, but points out that "when you circle the wagons, you don't get anywhere."

With time, the district has moved forward. A new school board was elected in 2012, and in 2013, the district

welcomed a new superintendent, Dr. Steven Martinez, who has taken a visible role on the campuses of Twin Rivers.

Paul Orlando, principal at Rio Tierra Junior High and Hazel Strauch Elementary schools, says he, too, is excited about the changes in the district. And one of the biggest changes he's noticed is collaboration.

The district has established professional learning communities, wherein administrators meet regularly to share information or discuss best practices, which are then shared at the school sites. Orlando meets regularly with his fellow principals and he says it's helped this large district be on the same page when it comes to things such as implementation of Common Core standards.

"We've been really working close together toward the common goal — and it shows," he says.

Orlando is proud of many recent changes, including the return of visual and performing arts teachers to the elementary school and \$1.3 million in improvements to his school's fields, which was accomplished through a joint venture with the city of Sacramento. He's also looking forward to a new paint job for the school, which opened close to 60 years ago.

"Just because we opened in 1956, doesn't mean we need to look like we opened in 1956," he says.

Many changes can be seen around the district: new paint, new HVAC units, teacher training days. But other changes you just feel. Students are proud to attend schools here. All staff members from bus drivers to custodians know how important they are. Teachers have the support to be good teachers.

Murray says creating a culture where educators are allowed to innovate and take risks has led to many of these improvements.

"If you try something and fail, it doesn't mean you're bad and ineffective, you just learn from it and move forward," Murray says. "There's a trusting environment that I don't think was there before."

From the implementation of Common Core standards to improving school safety, Twin Rivers is trying new approaches that facilitate student achievement. Because Twin Rivers has gotten back to the reason why they exist — the students.

"We want our students wanting to come to school. We want our teachers to say, 'Yeah! I work in Twin Rivers,'" Murray says. "Every day our teachers are in front of our students, and we want to enable them to do as effective a job as possible to meet student needs."

"We've been really working close together toward the common goal — and it shows."

Paul Orlando
Principal at Rio Tierra Junior High and
Hazel Strauch Elementary schools



Teachers and staff from Twin Rivers Unified School District show their spirit during the district's back-to-school rally in August.
Photos courtesy of TRUSD

MAKING CAMPUSES SAFE

The Twin Rivers Unified School District Police Department works closely with Educational Services and Student Services to provide a safe school environment for all district students.

CAMPUS BEATS:

Each of the district's comprehensive high schools (Foothill, Grant Union, Highlands and Rio Linda) and continuation high schools (Pacific and Vista Nueva) is assigned a dedicated school resource officer. These officers stay on the campuses of the high schools and are integrated into the school staff. The junior highs, elementary schools and charter schools are served by school resource officers assigned to mobile patrol.

ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS:

School resource officers have access to a youth services folder with a list of resources in the community, and they work with school administration to help prevent bullying and cyber-bullying on and off campus.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:

Instead of punishing a student after a crime has been committed, officers try to work with the youth, the school administration and the student's parents to find the root cause of the behavior. The process focuses on bringing together those who have been affected by the harmful behavior and provides opportunities for them to work together to repair the harm, which ultimately leads to true accountability for the student.

More Than a Uniform

School resource officer
bonds with students
by Mike Blount

Shelly Greenwalt walks around the campus of Grant Union High School greeting students each school day. She asks them about the stuff that matters to them:

How's basketball practice? Who scored in the last home game? It may not seem like it, but it's an important part of her job. As a school resource officer with the Twin Rivers Unified School District Police Department, Greenwalt says building trust and showing students that she cares actually help her prevent crime on campus.

School resource officers work side-by-side with school faculty to ensure everyone's safety. In the past, officers were mostly focused on reacting to a crime after it occurred. Greenwalt says she is happy to take a proactive approach, which requires her to wear multiple hats — peacekeeper and mentor.

"I think in the beginning, you come in to deal with the crime aspect and you're concentrated on doing just that — stopping fights, vandalism and truancy,"

Greenwalt says. "But as time has progressed and the children have gotten to know me, they come up and talk to me pretty regularly and let me know what's going on in their lives. They know that I'm here to help them."

Greenwalt and other school resource officers in Twin Rivers Unified School District attend training sessions on how to communicate with students. Greenwalt, in particular, tries to identify things that students are interested in and helps them find an outlet for it. For instance, if a student enjoys playing baseball, Greenwalt gets him connected to the coach. More than anything, she believes following through with a promise is something that helps build a relationship between her and a student.

Getting to know the students at Grant Union High School has given her the opportunity to be more than just a uniform

to them. If students are having problems at home or outside of school, Greenwalt connects them to resources in the community. If students are having issues with one another, she brings them together to try to get to the root of the problem.

"You have to bring logic into it and get them to think about the consequences — if you do this, this will happen," Greenwalt says. "You break it down in a way they can understand."

Because a large part of the job involves communicating with students, Greenwalt believes that it takes a special person to be a school resource officer.

"You have to be able to connect with the kids," Greenwalt says. "There is a bigger aspect than just being on campus. We're mentors and coaches and a resource for these children. When you come into a school and show that you care, it makes a world of difference."

**"When you come
into a school and
show that you care, it
makes a world
of difference."**

Shelly Greenwalt
Grant Union High school resource officer



Officer Shelly Greenwalt interacts with students at Grant Union High School. As a school resource officer, Greenwalt says building trust is an important part of her job.
Photo by Louise Mitchell

Support for Teachers

District initiatives focus on collaborative approach to helping teachers succeed

by Shannon Springmeyer

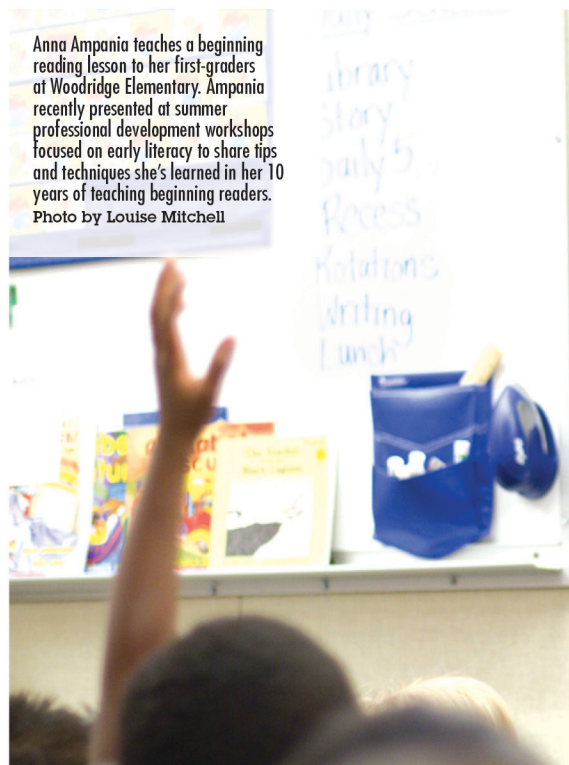
Something powerful is happening at Twin Rivers — just ask veteran teacher Anna Ampania.

“It’s a great time to be an educator right now in Twin Rivers,” she says.

The district is close to Ampania’s heart — “I kind of feel like Twin Rivers is my home,” she says. Not only has she been a first-grade teacher at Woodridge Elementary for more than 10 years, but she’s also a former Twin Rivers student.

Ampania moved to the area when she was in fifth grade and attended F.C. Joyce Elementary, which was then within one of the four districts that merged to become Twin Rivers. It was at F.C. Joyce that Ampania fell in love with books, thanks to the influence of an excellent school librarian, Rhonda Chedotte. This early experience helped instill in her a passion for learning, which eventually led to her interest in teaching.

Ampania says what she loves best about her job is helping students become confident readers by the end of first grade, and celebrating their successes along the way. Today, she feels better supported as a teacher in doing this work than ever before.



Anna Ampania teaches a beginning reading lesson to her first-graders at Woodridge Elementary. Ampania recently presented at summer professional development workshops focused on early literacy to share tips and techniques she’s learned in her 10 years of teaching beginning readers. Photo by Louise Mitchell

“I’ve never felt so included, as a teacher of our district.”

Anna Ampania
First-grade teacher

“This summer, we had the best professional development opportunities that I’ve experienced as a teacher,” Ampania says.

She participated in the planning and presentation of summer professional development workshops focused on supporting teachers’ instruction in early literacy.

“I’ve never felt so included, as a teacher of our district, in what we were going to offer other teachers. I felt like I actually had a say this last year and that I can speak up and someone will listen.”

Ampania credits a strong district leadership team, headed by Superintendent Dr. Steven Martinez, with having the clear vision and commitment to make the positive changes she’s seen so far.

“They know exactly what is needed, and they’re going to make sure it happens,” she says.

In addition to expanded and focused professional development, the district has also launched a new program this school year to offer one-on-one support to teachers. Each school site benefits from Teachers on Special Assignment, or TOSAs. TOSAs are skilled, experienced classroom teachers who

offer support and resources to the teachers at the schools they serve.

Elaine Wallace, a TOSA, says a lot of what she does is helping teachers focus on student learning outcomes.

“It’s easy to get caught up in the day-to-day demands of [being] a teacher,” she says. “Sometimes you have to step back and look at what you are really trying to accomplish.”

Wallace says teachers’ response to having an additional ally in the classroom has been overwhelmingly positive.

“The thing I enjoy most is when teachers will send you an email or catch you in the hallway and share a great experience that they’ve had in the classroom,” she says.

This increase in support for teachers has helped create a more collaborative environment, according to Ampania.

“Even though we were united as four districts, it always still felt like there were many districts inside our district,” she says. “Now I feel like you don’t get that sense anymore — that the walls are down, that we actually feel united as a team of educators.”

**A GREAT
PLACE FOR
TEACHERS**

Twin Rivers is on a mission to help its teachers be the best they can be.

REDUCING CLASS SIZES:

Hiring 33 new elementary teachers has enabled a reduction in class sizes, helping teachers provide more individual attention to students.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Offerings have been expanded and focused. Early literacy, Common Core math (for all grades), as well as educational technology workshops designed with and by experienced classroom teachers were offered over the summer. The district also had required training for 700 elementary and special education teachers.

TEACHERS ON SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT:

These are experienced teachers who work in pairs to support classroom teachers. TOSAs offer lesson demonstrations, resources, effective techniques and strategies, support in implementing Common Core standards and answers to teachers’ questions. Currently, 27 instructional TOSAs serve 39 pre-K through eighth grade schools.

Krystle Andrews, a nine-year veteran who holds a masters in educational leadership and an administrative services credential, left a classroom position in a neighboring district to join the TOSA program at Twin Rivers this year.

“I love my job,” she says. “I see room to grow in this district. I appreciate all the professional development that is offered for teachers.”

Installation of new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) units is part of \$25 million in renovations being completed at Twin Rivers Unified School District campuses over the next three years.
Photo by Louise Mitchell



Schools in the district have been long overdue for improvements to make a better learning environment for students and work environment for faculty. Here are some of the projects that have been completed, are in progress or will begin in fall 2014:

From the Ground Up

“Research shows that the pride that students have in their school turns into academic achievement.”

Bill McGuire
Deputy superintendent of
Twin Rivers Unified School District

Renovations aim to create a better environment for learning

by Mike Blount

The idea that a welcoming environment is more conducive to learning is something that Twin Rivers Unified School District takes to heart. Over the next three years, the district will spend more than \$25 million on 100 different improvement projects across 10 different elementary and high school campuses. It’s a huge undertaking, according to Deputy Superintendent Bill McGuire. But it’s one that’s long overdue.

“Research shows that the pride that students have in their school turns into academic achievement,” McGuire says. “These improvements also help the teaching staff. If they believe they are teaching in a high-quality work environment, the product of the students is higher.”

Some projects have already been completed, including the installation of new playground equipment, shade structures, ramps and asphalt at several schools. Immediately noticeable are exterior paint at eight school sites in the district — Foothill High School, Highlands High School, Rio Linda High School and Grant Union High School, as well as Woodridge Elementary, Fairbanks Elementary, Smythe Academy K-6, and Smythe Middle School.

“Our school needed attention, and it got the attention that it needed,” says Janis Wade, principal at Fairbanks Elementary. “Students and parents have expressed a new sense of community pride. Our school is now like a ray of sunshine in the heart of Strawberry Manor.”

A few new projects will begin in fall 2014, including the installation of two tennis courts, more exterior painting and various flooring and window projects. The school board also approved the renovation of Grant Union

High School’s swimming pool, which will be used for Grant’s swimming program and as a community pool during the summer.

Throughout these projects, McGuire says contractors will work to preserve the history of each school while making improvements.

“For a lot of families, there are generations that have gone to these schools,” McGuire says. “There’s a unique pride — especially with Grant Union High School — and we want to honor and respect the past while also building the future. That connection in tradition is important for success in many schools.”

One of the most urgent projects recently completed was the installation of new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) units at both Grant Union High School and Harmon Johnson Elementary School. Darris Hinson, principal at Grant Union High School, says the literal change in climate in classrooms has dramatically improved the morale of both students and faculty.

“Everyone is appreciative,” Hinson says. “Before, we had problems with ventilation — it being too hot during the summer and too cold during the winter. This school is over 80 years old and it’s going to need upgrades from time to time, and when they happen, it’s something to celebrate. But it’s also something that needs to be cared for and kept consistent moving into the future.”

COMPLETED

- New heating, ventilation and air conditioning units installed at Grant Union High School and Harmon Johnson Elementary School
- Rio Linda Regional Safety Annex
- Exteriors painted at eight school sites
- Asphalt improvement at six sites
- Restroom renovation at one site
- Playground equipment installed at four sites
- 14 wheelchair ramps installed across all sites
- Shade structures installed at four sites
- Carpet installation in 86 rooms across all sites
- Gazebo repaired at Foothill High School

IN PROGRESS

- Exterior painting of doors and trim at six sites
- Grant Union High School swimming pool renovation
- New curtains and drapes at 37 sites
- 161 new benches and tables being added across all sites
- 74 drinking fountains being added across all sites
- New tennis courts being added at Grant Union, Rio Linda, Foothill and Highland high schools
- Exterior painting of Del Paso, Rio Tierra and Foothill Ranch schools
- New flooring installation in multi-purpose rooms and restrooms across all sites
- Window security push bar screen across all sites



Improving Reading Skills

by Mike Blount

Numerous studies have shown that students who are not reading on grade level have a harder time in school, and if they are unable to catch up, it could lead to them dropping out. Early literacy programs at Twin Rivers Unified School District aim to ensure that students have a foundation of skills to read at their grade level and beyond. Executive Director for Elementary Schools Anne Zeman says teachers of kindergarten through third grade attend an early literacy institute held by the school district that trains them on teaching methods. When they go into classrooms, teachers are prepared to help students develop a series of skills, including the sounds of language they need to be familiar with to begin reading.

“Students who are not reading on grade level are less likely to keep pace and the effects can be pretty dire, including correlations with poverty, being arrested and low feelings about self,” Zeman says. “This is one of those critical challenges that we have to get right.”

Bringing Back the Arts

by Mike Blount

Arts programs have been cut back in schools throughout California in the last few years, but Twin Rivers Unified School District is ramping up its programs to reach more students. Arts Curriculum Facilitator Jacqueline White says the district has hired seven music teachers and four visual and performing arts teachers for the next school year. Every first- through third-grade student will have a visual arts class and every fourth- through sixth-grade student will have a music class at every elementary school in the district. White says she is hoping to expand arts programs into middle schools in the next few years because all students need to learn how to explore the creative areas of their brains.

“The arts are really about problem solving,” White says. “When you’re looking at a blank piece of paper, which way should you turn it? Water color or pastels? What message am I trying to send with this work? The professional world is always looking for creative people who can solve problems.”

Parent University

by Shannon Springmeyer

Neighborhood schools aren’t just for the kids anymore. This October, Twin Rivers Unified School District is launching Parent University, an innovative program that will invite parents and community members to attend classes at six strategically located campuses, inviting them to become more connected to their local schools.

“What the research shows us is the more involved that our parents and community are with our children and youth that we serve, the better they’re able to do in school and beyond,” says Yolanda Mayoral Falkenberg, parent and community involvement coordinator for the district.

Parent University will engage parents through a nine-week workshop series offered several times throughout the year. Class offerings will be tailored to the local community’s needs and may include such topics as:

- The path to career, college and university
- Supporting Common Core standards at home
- Social-emotional learning
- Restorative justice and conflict resolution
- Leadership & advocacy

One-day workshops on targeted topics will be expanded to additional sites that don’t host a full Parent University.

English Language Learners

by Mike Blount

Twin Rivers is a diverse community, with 38 percent of students being in enrolled in long-term English language learner programs. To serve that community better, the school district has adopted new initiatives to help students become proficient in English and get to college. Director of English Language Learner programs Graciela Garcia-Torres says one key change in the program is new courses that target a student’s needs if he or she is falling behind. Teachers will design courses that are tailor-made for each student and work with them using the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination)

college-readiness system, which is designed to raise the student’s expectations. The school district has also created more Spanish courses for middle and high school students to improve their native-language skills. Research shows that students must have strong skills in their first language for greater success in becoming bilingual.

“Knowing the importance that language plays in the lives of each individual, we need to respond and provide opportunities for our students so they are successful,” Garcia-Torres says.

For more information or to participate in an upcoming community forum to provide input on course topics, contact Yolanda Mayoral Falkenberg at 916-566-1600 ext. 50035 or Yolanda.Falkenberg@twinriversusd.org.

Change is Happening in **Twin Rivers**

You feel it in the classrooms. You see it on the freshly painted walls. You hear it from the students. Things are changing. It's time to take a fresh look at Twin Rivers Unified School District. The district is putting initiatives in place that address:

- Teacher training
- School safety
- Facilities improvements
- English language learners
- Arts education
- Early literacy
- Parent involvement
- High school counselors
- World languages in middle school



Feel the Difference!

Visit www.twinriversusd.org for

- List of schools • District news • Employment
- School board meetings and agendas



PARENTS: GET INVOLVED!

Contact Yolanda Mayoral Falkenberg for more information about Parent University, PAC meetings or Community Conversations: **916-566-1600 ext. 50035** or **Yolanda.Falkenberg@twinriversusd.org**. For all other opportunities, please contact your child's school directly.

Strong partnerships between parents and schools lead to stronger students. Take advantage of these opportunities for partnering with your child's educators:

VISIT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL — OFTEN!

Watch throughout the year for special events, such as pancake breakfasts, potluck nights and school celebrations. Celebrate your child's successes at open house nights in the spring. Volunteer to read to your child's class or help out on campus. Join Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students), a parent involvement group especially for fathers and father figures. The more your child sees you on campus, the better he or she is prepared for success in school.

PARENT RESOURCE CENTERS

Parent Resource Centers at 14 existing and planned sites invite parents on campus for support, offering services such as computer access, English language classes, GED classes, parenting classes and more.

PARENT UNIVERSITY

Parent University offers nine-week workshops throughout the year on a variety of topics that help parents participate in and support their child's education.

PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A redesigned Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) brings together different representatives from each school site for quarterly district meetings. Rather than meeting separately, the PAC will unite with one vision for all students in the district. PAC and school site council meetings, as well as monthly workgroups on targeted topics, are open to all.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Join Parent and Community Involvement Coordinator Yolanda Mayoral Falkenberg for a cup of coffee and conversation, offered at local spots in the community at various times throughout the year. Stop by to give input and discuss topics important to you. Many principals also offer Coffee & Conversations throughout the year.